

Sammie Abdullah Abbott

 1908 - 1990

It has been said that a man has not truly lived unless he has been passionately involved in the issues of his time. Sam Abbott lived his life fully and passionately and with complete dedication to all the important issues of his day wherever he found them, wherever they led him.

He was first and last a man with a clear and unflinching sense of what was important. His special gifts, among many, as a political analyst, organizer, and talented leader were blended by a fierce attention to truth and the democratic process.

His was a life of the most generous of spirits in that he put justice and truth first. He loved it, he believed in it, he enjoyed it.

Today we celebrate Sam's life, remembering forever his example. We cannot leave this gathering of friends and family who have gained so much from him without knowing that we are all charged, as only he could charge us, with the need to continue to address the issues of social justice and hypocrisy wherever we find them, wherever it leads us.

And as we face the issues of our times we will hear Sam's strong, determined voice urging us to action, to make the most of our years, as he made of his, to live truly and to truly live.

Angela and Tom Rooney
Washington, DC
January 5, 1991

Activities recalled by

SAMMIE ABDULLAH ABBOTT

Born 82 years ago (4/25/08) in Ithaca, NY, of Syrian parentage. Educated in local public schools, Grand Central School of Art, and Cornell University where he was awarded the Charles Goodwin Sands Memorial Medal by its College of Architecture (1931).



Sam (center, with two hats), Cornell thespians.

Early pencil sketch, 1929.



Sam, with his father Abraham (directly behind), cousin Joe Abbott, and the uncles.



Labor Organizing 1930's

When FDR closed the banks in the depths of the depression, Sam left college to organize farmers and unemployed in New York's Southern Tier. Became voluntary (unpaid) organizer in Buffalo and Niagara Frontier to build CIO industrial unions in steel, chemical and maritime. Supported self by painting watercolors for which he was paid \$10.00 each and his agent got \$3.00.



Sam as a young organizer.



A reproduction of Sammie A. Ahl's prize winning drawing, "The CIO Comes to Town"

"My family were business people, and I didn't know anything more about things than what I read in the headlines. How did I get started? Events moved me—people out of work asked me to help them and I was strong willed."



Sam's vision of the Thirties.

Washington DC

Moved to Nation's capital in 1940 to work in construction where he helped organize laborers and hod carriers union. Aided his father-in-law, a bricklayer, to build first of two homes in Takoma Park.

"I'm a perpetually mad person. I hate injustice. As far as I'm concerned, I'm living to fight injustice. I'm living to fight the goddamned thing. I'm too mad to sleep."

World War II

Along with three brothers and sister, enlisted in World War II. Staff Sgt. in intelligence, 391st Fighter Squadron of 366th Fighter Group, 9th Air Force. Received Bronze Star medal, five campaign stars for European Theater, Presidential Unit Citation and Belgian Fourragère. Opposed Korean, Vietnamese and Persian Gulf wars.



4/4/44

*We the Pilots of the
391st Fighter Squadron
take this opportunity to thank
our friend Sammie Abbott
for his untiring effort in our
behalf.*

*Your time and talent so
unintentionally donated, have in
no small way contributed to
our well being and Success*

*May the future bring you
every Success & Happiness!*

Fighter pilot alongside one of the many insignias
Sam painted for troops penetrating the Nazi borders.



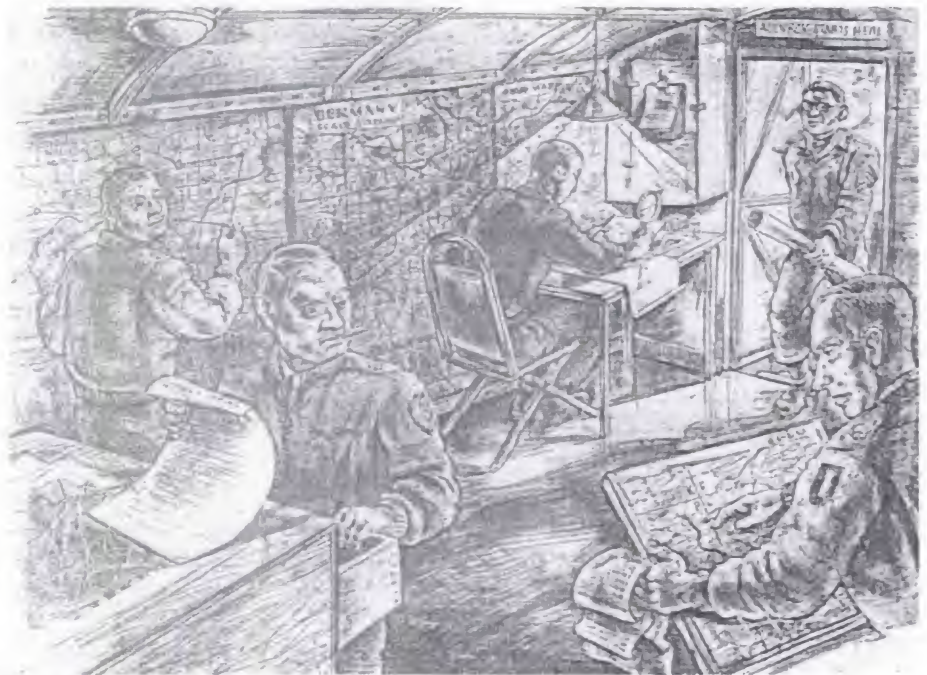
<i>John A. Barry</i>	<i>Robert J. Ferguson</i>
<i>Paul Carroll</i>	<i>James C. Moore</i>
<i>Leslie Crosswhite</i>	<i>James J. Drame</i>
<i>Neil D. Stanley</i>	<i>John E. W. Kitten</i>
<i>Harvey H. Stachler</i>	<i>George D. Anhalt</i>
<i>Allen H. Lee</i>	<i>Joe F. Richmond</i>
<i>Charles R. Blair</i>	<i>Edwin D. Doherty</i>
<i>A. M. Callahan</i>	<i>Paul B. Blawie</i>
<i>Elmo Brinson</i>	<i>James H. Austin</i>
<i>James M. Fogle</i>	



Sam with his first-born, George.



The Abbott Family during the War years (From center, clockwise: Sam's mother, Anna Simmons; brother David M., a Marine on the Pacific Front; father, Abraham; brother Robert, of the Merchant Seaman; sister Amelia; brother George, on the front lines at the Liberation; and sister Helen. Sam and sister Julia, a major in the Army Nursing Corps, were with the troops at time of photo).



One of many Army life sketches by Sam, the "Group Intelligence Trailer" where he delivered cartography reports.

McCarthy Period

Soon after World War II ended, he headed DC and Montgomery campaigns for Lord Bertrand Russell's Stockholm Peace Petition which called on US Government to pledge to not again use the Bomb. Also active in Progressive Party's 1948 presidential candidacy of Henry Wallace. For this, and his equal rights activity, he was hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee. As a result he was fired from his commercial art job and black-listed for over two years before he started a free-lance career in commercial art. About a couple of decades later, FBI Special Agent P. N. Wilson told him, "We know you're not a foreign agent—all we want of you as a patriotic American citizen is to join the NAACP and report back to us about its personnel and plans."

One of Sam's many sketches done during courtroom procedures.



"I took the Declaration of Independence literally. I took seriously that all men are created equal."

Freeway

Served as publicity director of Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis (ECTC) from 1963-75, the umbrella committee of organizations opposing freeways and for mass transportation. Congress and local governments were pushing for a network of 28.5 miles of one-block wide ditches called freeways to carve up the Nation's Capital. Congress held up funds for Metro until the freeways were built. ECTC forged unity between black and white, rich and poor sections of the city and suburbs under the slogans of "No white men's roads through black men's homes" and "Subway Yes and Freeways No". Citizen action plus over 1,000 arrests created context for successful legal action and final favorable votes in National Capital Planning Commission and DC City Council. Helped organize three National Conferences on the Transportation Crisis where citizen delegates from 54 cities attended. They proposed legislation which allowed States to turn over Federal highway funds to mass transit. Congress adopted this proposal and DC Metro was born with the first \$2.6 billion diverted from highways to Metro.

"I never liked to get up in the middle of a meeting and yap my mouth off. The first time I did, my wife tugged on my coat to sit down. But when the issues are important and no one else gets up, I have to."

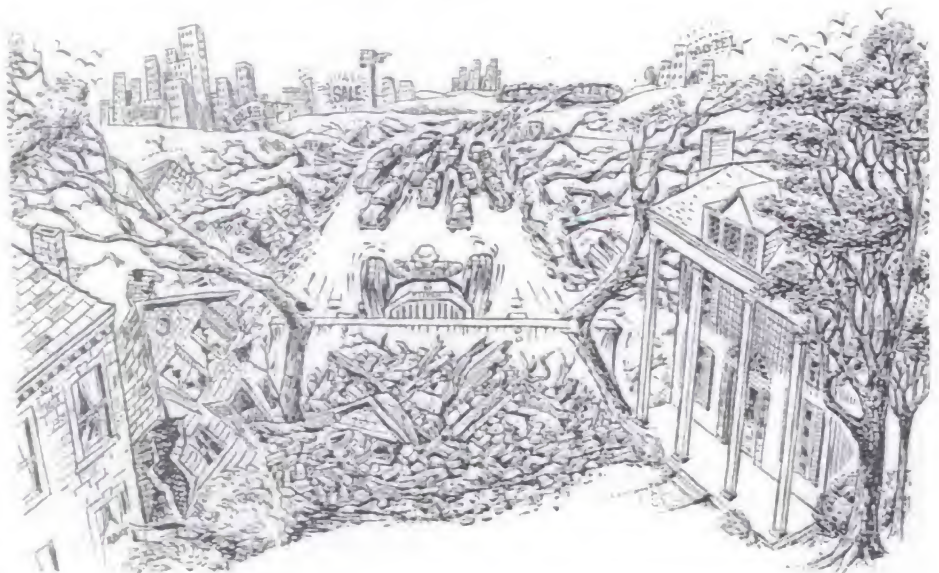


"The whites in the suburbs wanted convenient ways to get downtown, and it was the blacks in the District whose neighborhoods would be torn down for road construction, who'd suffer. I coined the slogan, 'No white men's roads through black men's homes.' It was economically and racially biased and I couldn't stand it."

"That was one hell of a fulfilling fight. We had rich people from Georgetown working with poor blacks. We had John Birchers working with conservationists. I don't care who's involved in our issue, so long as they all agree on a minimum program and forget about the rest during the struggle."



Three drawings, Sam's graphic reaction to the freeway crisis.



"I am for creating obstacles to decrease the individual's dependency on the automobile and to increase the use of public transportation."

Mayor

Lost first try for Mayor of Takoma Park (Population 17,000), by 8 votes in 1978. Won next three two-year terms by substantial margins. Lost by 7 votes in 1986 race. During tenure many innovative actions were adopted: Rent control was instituted when most jurisdictions pulled out; Speed humps and 4-way stops were put in to slow traffic; Established city newsletter; Promoted citizen committees; Prevented schools closures by County; Became Tree City, USA and Fifth Sanctuary City in Nation; Became a Nuclear Free Zone with strongest provisions to boycott products of any corporation involved in nuclear-related production or research.

Invited by mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (August 1985), to attend their commemorations of the Bomb. Along with officials from over 50 countries, helped found the International Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-City solidarity. Instrumental in getting Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to adopt a nuclear-free policy.



Swearing-in, first-term, Mayor of Takoma Park, MD. With Sam are Evelyn Longen, wife Ruth, Harold Myers, and Elizabeth Bosarth.

save Takoma Park
preserve it or lose it!



1-21/87

THE WASHINGTON POST



Takoma Park Mayor Sammie Abbott leads a contingent of protesters outside South African Embassy.

3 Antiapartheid Demonstrators Arrested Here and in N.Y.

Roger Wilkins and Takoma Park Mayor Charged

Three persons were arrested in Washington and five in New York yesterday in the continuing demonstrations against the South African government's policies of racial segregation and white-minority rule.

In the District, those arrested and charged with demonstrating within 500 feet of an embassy include Roger W. Wilkins, a senior research fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies and an assistant attorney general in the Johnson administration; Ralph Abernathy III, son of the civil rights activist, and Sammie Abbott, the mayor of Takoma Park.

Their arrests bring to 70 the number of persons arrested here since the "Free South Africa" movement started the protests Nov. 21.

In New York, five labor leaders were arrested in front of the South African consulate on Park Avenue and charged with disorderly conduct, bringing to 168 the number of persons arrested there in connection with demonstrations that started Dec. 3.

Meanwhile, Maryland State Sen. Clarence M. Mitchell III (D), president of the National Caucus of Black State Legislators, said that members of the organization in 42 states have agreed to seek a "statutory statement on South Africa" in their jurisdictions. Mitchell has filed legislation that, if passed, would bar Maryland from investing any more of its pension funds in firms that do business in South Africa.

On Wednesday, disorderly conduct charges were dropped against 43 New York protesters, including Rep. Major Owen (D-N.Y.), former Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton, Bishop Emerson Moore, labor leader Victor Gotbaum and the Rev. William Sloan Coffin.

The action by Judge Arlene Silverman in Manhattan criminal court came after arresting police officers failed to appear in court to submit affidavits relaying the charges against those taken into custody.

"I've always been called an outsider. I've pushed for citizen participation in things all my life, and I don't see why I have to change now that I'm in a position to actually do something about it. I'm having meetings with every damn person around, citizens, country officials, everybody."



Logo for the T.P. Boys & Girls Club, one of many designs Sam created for a variety of area-wide and national organizations.

SECOND ANNUAL **Takoma Park** **folk festival**

SUNDAY, SEPT. 9
11 AM - 6 PM

TAKOMA PARK
JUNIOR HIGH FIELD

7611 Piney Branch Road
near Phila. Ave.

(To be held indoors in case of rain)

FREE ADM.

✦ A Benefit for the Takoma Park Boys & Girls Club

SEE
BACK
PAGE



"I deal with people as individuals . . . We won't be unanimous on things, but that's okay. When everyone is unanimous, it's time to get worried."

PROGRAM TO PROMOTE THE SOLIDARITY OF CITIES
TOWARDS THE TOTAL ABOLITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The City of Hiroshima The City of Nagasaki

Please respond to:
Hiroshima Peace Memorial Hall
Office of the Mayor
Hiroshima City Office
1-2 Nakajima-cho
Naka-ku Hiroshima
730 Japan

May 21, 1986

The Honorable Sam Abbott
Mayor
City of Takoma Park
City Hall
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
U.S.A.

Drawing by Sam Abbott: "Will Shelters Work?"



Dear Mayor Abbott:

On behalf of Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we would like to express our deepest appreciation for your approval of the "Program to Promote the Solidarity of Cities towards the Total Abolition of Nuclear Weapons."

The twenty posters of A-bomb photographs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were sent separately. We hope you will make use of them to hold a photographic exhibition and to have the actual nature of the A-bomb disasters widely known to the citizens of your city.

Sincerely yours,

Yasushi Yamada
Yasushi Yamada
Secretary-General

"Nuclear disarmament is too important to leave to the national government." "Imagine what we could do with the money here in cities if we could use the money being spent on the military . . . I think the real issue is survival for cities . . . Even if no bomb goes off, (the arms race) is going to kill us financially."

Litigation

Among the successful lawsuits in which he participated were:

- "The 1878 Committee", led by Mary Church Terrell in its victorious Thompson Restaurant case which ended discrimination in places of public accommodation;



Julius W. Hobson, D.C. activist and friend much-admired by Sam, who joined with him in many successful legal battles.

- The landmark Julius Hobson case before Judge Skelly Wright which forced equal expenditures per pupil in the public schools;
- "Hobson vs Wilson" which successfully sued the FBI and the DC Metropolitan Police Department for their violation of the constitutional rights of anti-war and civil rights activists;
- Recent Supreme Court decision (23 years in the courts), which awarded \$10.6 million to the riders of the old DC Transit Company;
- A founder of the DC Committee for the Bill of Rights, and an 1986 board member of the Montgomery County Chapter of the ACLU;
- Except for 90-day incarceration in the 1937 Republic Steel strike, he was released in about 40 arrests defending the constitutional rights to assemble and petition.



Most people remember Sammie in connection with the Freeway fight. They do not appreciate another important battle, when a number of peace and community activists sued the FBI and the DC police for harassment (HOBSON vs WILSON). We won and were awarded close to a million dollars. The courts later reduced the amount and even excluded some of us from the award, but it remains a very important victory for people's Civil Liberties, protection from intrusions by government police agencies.

Sam's death is a great loss. The young people he inspired, and the changes in the community that he accomplished, will be his legacy.

Abe Bloom

Citations

The Janice Holland Award, Women Strike for Peace
Community Service Award, Seventh Day Adventists
The Elizabeth Scull Plaque by Friendship Heights Village Council
The Kathleen Winsten Award at Roosevelt Day Dinner of the Americans for Democratic Action
1967 Man-of-the-Year Cup by Washington Chapter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Human Relations Award by the DC Federation of Civic Associations
First local award by LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens)
Outstanding Public Service Award, 1990, by the Arab American Institute.

☼ Help found first Earth Day in 1970.

☼ 1984 and 1988 co-chair for presidential candidate Jesse Jackson in 8th Congressional District, MD. Co-founder of local Rainbow Coalition.

Family

Married 53 years, he and his wife, Ruth, raised three children: George, a physician; Nancy, a writer; and Susan, an artist.

*Grandpa Sam and Grandma Ruth,
with Roxanna Abbott Young.*

*Grandpa with Nathaniel Abbott Vaughan.
There are two other grandchildren, Jim Garrison
Abbott and James Colin Abbott Arisman.*



*To the Family of Sammie Abbott,
The members of the League of United Latin American
Citizens (LULAC) of Montgomery County wish to convey
our condolences to the family of former Mayor of Takoma
Park Sammie Abbott.*

*We unanimously conferred upon him a life-time mem-
bership in our organization for his tremendous courage.
He worked fiercely toward making the City of Takoma
Park a sanctuary for refugees escaping the brutality of
right wing regimes in Central America, especially from El
Salvador. He was always a good friend and ally in our
struggle for justice. We will sorely miss him.*

*Respectfully yours,
Rudy Arredondo, President, League of United Latin
American Citizens*

Sam Abbott made a huge difference in the history of
Takoma Park and in the lives of all of us who worked
with him and were inspired by his example.
George Leventhal*

Sam Abbott was our founding chairman. Without him,
there would never have been a Montgomery County
Rainbow Coalition. In his memory, we will continue our
work in the community.*

*Don Pelles, Chairman
Mickey Leland Rainbow Coalition of Montgomery County*

In loving memory of our founder and first chairman, we
dedicate ourselves to the mission of continuing the strug-
gle in the name of Sammie A. Abbott, who was a
champion dedicated to the betterment of all people with a
sense of integrity only a few people have ever achieved.
We all love the Abbott family and find in the gladness of
our hearts, that at last our friend and mentor has found
the peace he so much desired for us all in this life.*

*Daryl R. Stevens, Montgomery County Rainbow
Coalition*

On behalf of the Montgomery County NAACP and
myself, I want to express our profound regret over the
passing of your husband, Sammie Abbott. We also extend
to you our sincere sympathy.*

Sammie was a man of deep conviction on behalf of those

*who were the victims of injustice practiced by people and
institutions of power. He never placed his own comfort
and safety above his advocacy on behalf of those who were
denied and suffered.*

*Very sincerely,
Roscoe R. Nix, National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People,
Montgomery County, Maryland Branch*

Sammie Abbott became a legend for his commitment to
making our world safe from the powerful weapons of war
and safe from the invasions of forces that would harm our
well-being, whether by diminishing our civil rights, or
by putting impersonal roads through the areas we called
home.*

*But in addition to admiring his commitment to causes
in which we shared belief, I treasured Sammie because he
was always a supportive friend who gave just the help
and advice that was needed. With his death, we have lost
a true friend, but we will keep his memory alive with our
own commitment.*

*Hilda Howland M. Mason
Council Member at Large
Washington, DC*

We were deeply saddened to receive the news that brother
Sammie was taken from us. He was a tribute not only to
the Arab American community but to the workers of
America. Although he will be sadly missed by all, his
memory will remain with us as a guiding light for justice
and equality.*

*Jim Abourezk, Chairman
Albert Mokhiber, President
American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee*

I first became aware of Sammie Abbott in 1978, the year
that I came to Washington to head the Palestine Human
Rights Campaign and he first ran for mayor of Takoma
Park. I became enchanted with his political dynamism,
his feisty commitment to the principles he believed in,
and his activism in support of causes he and I both held
dear. Knowing that he was the kind of person he was
was enough for me, but when I learned later that he was
of Arab descent it added an extra dimension to my
appreciation of him.*

*In 1982, in the wake of Israel's invasion of Lebanon,
Sammie decided to hold a public forum in Takoma Park
on U.S. policy in the Middle East, an event which*

brought us together for the first time. As I discovered more about him, he also found out more about me and he became closer to us and to our work. I had a sense of validation, of knowing that I was on the right track, when Sammie became interested and active in our work.

Earlier this year, AAI was proud to present Sammie with our Outstanding Public Service Award. Characteristically, rather than merely accept the award, he used his time at our podium to challenge us to rid the Middle East of nuclear, chemical, biological, and other weapons of mass destruction, an issue more relevant today than it has ever been.

For us, Sammie's always been a leader, someone on the cutting edge, a role model who always delivered his message with a sense of humor.

James Zoghy
Arab American Institute

Takoma Park Peace Movement

The loss of Sammie Abbott is a great blow to Takoma Park and to the peace movement. Takoma Park, under the leadership of Mayor Sammie Abbott, became a nuclear free zone in 1983. Our Nuclear Free Zone Act prohibits the city from buying products or services from companies that make nuclear weapons or their components. Sammie staunchly supported our NFZ Act and opposed all attempts to weaken it. In 1984, as mayor, he found another radio frequency that could be used by the police department so that the Takoma Park police would not buy radios from a nuclear company. In 1985 he opposed putting a waiver provision into the NFZ Act. Unfortunately, the city council voted the waiver provision into the Act. In 1987 Sammie opposed a waiver of the Act for the police to buy GM police cars and testified against the proposed waiver at a city council hearing and the waiver was voted down. In 1990 he opposed a waiver of the Act to buy public works trucks and police cars from Ford. In an infamous vote, the city council voted for a waiver for the first time in the Act's seven year history. Sammie was correctly outraged at that vote.

Exemplifying his complete commitment to ending the nuclear arms race, in August, 1985, Mayor Abbott attended the 40th anniversary commemoration of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki that was held in Japan. He helped found the International Conference of Mayors for Peace through Inter-City Solidarity with officials from over 50 countries and was instrumental in getting the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments to adopt an inter-jurisdictional pro-nuclear freeze policy.

In June, 1988 the Takoma Park Peace Task Force recognized Sammie's decades of work for peace by giving

him a Peace Award, a plaque, for his lifetime commitment to peace and social justice. He earned the eternal respect of the members of the Takoma Park Peace Task Force for his unwavering support of Takoma Park's Nuclear Free Zone Act. All of us were proud to know and work with Sammie. He was unique and his integrity and leadership will be sorely missed.

The Takoma Park Peace Task Force

It's so hard to say sayonara to you, Sammie. You were a little, wiry man but you were a giant of integrity, commitment to principle, and fiery inspiration. I will always miss your gravelly voice, your hilarious put-downs, and your impassioned energy. May your flaming spirit lead all of us to carry on the struggle for equality, peace, and social justice. I walk taller because you were my friend.

Kay Dellinger

If it weren't for Sammie, I would never have entered politics in Takoma Park. He urged me on, even when my opponent began mud-slinging, in his usual style: "What the Hell do you care what the . . . says?" Sammie's spirit will be an inspiration for all of us for all times.

Sharon Levy

Thanks, Sammie, for showing us that the fight for peace and justice has no boundaries. Takoma Park now stands proudly as a part of the great Global Village.

Jay Levy

Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis

"... a great victory for the people." How many times have we all heard that statement from Sammie Abbott? In the great freeway battles of the 60's and the 70's, the "highwaymen", and their money mafia and political clients, certainly heard it a lot more than they had ever bargained for! . . . we got the METRO instead of freeways, and the people rejoiced. Sam taught the citizens of D.C. and the greater Washington metropolitan area how we could "fight city hall", and the statehouse too. He also taught a host of other cities how to fight as well. These cities ranged from Seattle to Boston, New York to Atlanta, New Orleans to Phoenix. Most importantly, he taught us all how to win. He taught us how to organize, how to "take people from where they are" and educated our fellow citizens and foes as well. He taught us to understand each other, to appreciate and encourage the

commitment and talent that each person can bring to such a struggle. He taught us how to plan and conduct our battles in the streets, the neighborhoods, the courts and hearing rooms, in the halls of Congress and the offices of Washington politics, and any other field of the freeway wars. He taught us the value of solidarity against those who would divide us; those who would pit race against race, rich against poor, city against suburb. Most importantly he taught us, in the spirit of the old Quaker precept, to "speak truth to power". Sam's life was "a great victory for the people", and we are thankful for it!

The ECTC (Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis), founded by Sammie Abbott in 1965, grew out of the need for citizens to respond quickly to rapid developments in transportation planning (in reality mostly having to do with land speculation and social manipulation in the Washington DC metropolitan area). The ECTC was formed to be, and operated as, an "action coordinating" coalition of organizations and individual citizens in the fight against freeways in urban/suburban areas. Under Sam's guidance, the ECTC soon developed into the hard core grassroots educational and action vehicle that any citizen effort requires to be successful.

In 1968 the success of the ECTC inspired the formation of the NCTC (National Coalition on the Transportation Crisis). Sam was a founding member and its guiding light. The NCTC represented citizen action groups fighting freeways from twenty-two cities from across the country. Through its insistence on valid environmental impact statements, and improved public hearing requirements and procedures for any interstate highway proposal, the NCTC has had a great impact on the formulation and redefinition of national Interstate Highway planning.

Fred Heutte

I am of the conviction that Sam was a man of justice, and a just man, and just a man, too . . . He kept his roots planted by (the) water—justice, truth, compassion—I never heard him call a wrong plan, or saw him make a tactical or strategic error. He was the master of the field. He conducted a guerilla war, moving his forces around a battlefield only he fully understood . . .

He said, once at least: "Man's inhumanity to man will never end." But he was willing to take up arms in the fight against those forces who forever proclaim man less than man, human being less than human. And for all that: He was just a man . . .

Anne Huette

He was the prime mover . . .

Johnie D. Wilson
Former vice-chairman, ECTC

I saw Sam as a pollinator. People tend to think that the most important thing bees do is make honey. But the most important thing they do is pollinate. That was Sam. He was probably the only person who could make us go a step beyond, and make us use what we had, to reach our potential.

For example, I doubt if anyone else could have seen the merit of bringing together Reggier Booker, who was president of "Niggers, Inc." and the upperclass women of Georgetown . . . and to see that a pollination between these groups was necessary in order to bring the fight against the freeway to the point where people realized that it was as important to the Palisades as it was to U Street. It was important for these groups to work together to stop it. It was only Sam who could have seen that the cross-pollination of such organizations could happen and would be effective, very effective, in the project.

This talent for cross-pollination also extended to include people who were committed to education and community involvement in education, such as the Adams School and the Morgan School. Their commitment had to be equal to their commitment to stopping the freeway. Sometimes after a meeting of the boards for these schools, board members went to sleep on the banks of the Potomac to stop the freeway. Sam even brought it together with the ending of the Vietnam War. It was only Sam who could have done that, all that cross-pollination.

In doing that, he taught us not only the pollination of groups with like interests and different backgrounds, but he taught us the cross-pollination of groups with different backgrounds and different interests—so we all felt comfortable coming together and speaking out passionately on any one of these issues or all of these issues.

Josephine Butler
Former chair, Morgan School
(Marie Reed Community Learning Center)

Takoma Park Activists

We've admired, benefitted, and above all, learned from the conscience, strength, and compassion he gave the community.

Larry and Enid Hodes

Our lives and Takoma Park Junior High were certainly richer because of Mayor Sam. Praise for his life!

Kay Meek

I hope Sam knew what a wonderful influence he was on me and so many others searching for truth, justice, and

homesty. Heroes are hard to come by — but he was definitely one of mine.

Rusty Hur

(Condolences from Karen Mitchell, President, the executive board and member of AFSCME Local 3399, Takoma Park Municipal Employees)

Mr. Abbott was always out front, championing the cause of the least of the least, an outspoken advocate for justice, and seeing that the right things were done. He will be sorely missed!

Mrs. Betty C. Carter

Sam's acerbic style had its light side as well. I recall a mid-1970s City Council meeting in which then-mayor John Roth announced proudly that the state would be stocking Sligo Creek with trout. Sam's distinctive voice rose from the back of the room: "Alive or dead?"

David Prosten

He danced with all the dancers. He taught his children well.

Tom Gagliardo, Mary Ann Hylander, Katie Hylander Gagliardo

In Sam's 1978 and '80 campaigns for Mayor of Takoma Park we put together groups of "door-knockers." It was effective, coming so close in '78 and winning in '80. Ruth, Nancy, and Susan were out there every week-end. The planning and strategy sessions with Sam were inspiring but no one liked tramping around each ward in the snow. Sam often spoke of how the Takoma Park system of municipal elections discouraged citizen involvement. After he became mayor, Sam delivered on two related campaign promises to open-up the electoral system: first, was to change the municipal elections from February to November, so campaigning could take place in the fall instead of the winter; second, was the successful drive for ward-only, rather than at-large, election of Council Members, so that representatives from all parts of Takoma Park could serve on the Council.

Sam put art and ecology together. He was a recycler before the rest of us. I remember how much pleasure he took in showing me the various treasures he had rescued from D.C. curbsides — statuary and gargoyles that found a new home in the beautiful terraced garden in the Abbott's house on Birch Street. He obviously got much joy from being a scavenger and he correctly took my teasing as the highest compliment.

Joan Jacobs (Prosten)

If each of us places Sam Abbott on the list of most unforgettable characters, it's because that's where he belongs. He was a man of strong character and countless achievements.

Throughout his life, Sam actively integrated the American ideal of equality and individual excellence. As a public person, he championed individual freedoms and responsibilities. As a private person, he created fine art. Truly, at times it was difficult to believe that he was only one person.

He is a powerful and articulate figure in our memories of saving our community—from the first Save Takoma Park Committee (1964) through his term as Mayor of the City of Takoma Park (1980-85). In one sense, we will miss his presence. In another sense, his energy remains with us and inspires all who speak out boldly and take action against injustice wherever they see it.

Mary Ann McGuire

Sam was not only our leader and inspiration in the freeway fight. For me, he was also the rare friend who sees, and shows that he sees, the small hypocrisies and pretenses that most friends and acquaintances either don't see or won't acknowledge face-to-face. Most often, Sam did this with wry and gentle humor, occasionally with sharper words, but always, for me, with a positive result for my personal growth.

The world will be lonelier without Sam. But his passing jolts me into recalling his fighting, implacable spirit. I can best honor his memory by refusing to give up.

Peggy Bruton

My initial recollection of Sammie was in 1971, at a meeting on Thursday, October 14, to discuss the infamous "mustard plan", which had apparently already been approved by the City. I was there because I was concerned, but had no idea what, if anything, could be done, when suddenly Sammie was delivering a fiery speech the likes of which I'd never heard! To say I was set ablaze is an understatement; Hell, I was ready to celebrate victory! Just as suddenly, Ed Turner, the City Treasurer began repeatedly calling Sammie "comrade, comrade", until exiting arm-in-arm with Mayor Miller.

I was absolutely astonished! Within a few, tumultuous moments I had glimpsed the extraordinary future of my Community, while witnessing its decaying past.

My revelation was not really so incredulous, however... I had simply for the first time been in the presence of Sammie Abbott.

Sometime during the mid-70's at a Planning Board hearing—Royce Hanson chaired the Board at the time—Sammie heatedly disputed traffic count figures developed by Park & Planning staff which "clearly supported" the "necessity" for widening Philadelphia Avenue. Oh, it

was masterful as Sammie deftly refuted the published figures with correct, specific traffic count figures which were about 2/3 less than those claimed by the staff. The discussion was suddenly in complete disarray, and the issue was tabled until further studies could be undertaken.

On the way home I asked him, "How in the world did you know such obscure statistics as those?" Sammie sheepishly replied, "Hell, Bob, I don't know what the damn figures are, but I had to say something!"

I remember when Sammie first declared his candidacy for mayor—1978 I believe. A third candidate, Dave Gray, was running also. At the time I had an office in the Dupont Circle Building, on the floor beneath Sammie's 10th floor office.

It was early in the afternoon of the final day to withdraw one's candidacy, and I knew Dave Gray was scheduled to meet with Sammie, on the 10th floor, to discuss withdrawing. Suddenly Sammie literally burst into my office, mad as Hell, grumping that he was "out of the damned thing". On discovering that he had flipped a coin—and lost—I demanded, "Why in the world did you do that?" He stopped, looked at me with the mischievous, embarrassed grin spreading over his face, and replied, "Aw—I didn't think he'd be stupid enough to do it."

On rare occasions an individual passes through this life leaving basic assumptions forever changed, and touching lives which will never be the same. Sammie Abbott—Husband, Father, Friend, Mentor and Former Mayor of Takoma Park—is such a person.

As one who knew, loved, respected and proudly followed Sammie, I celebrate his staggering accomplishments and his aggressively uncompromising commitment to decency.

Robert H. Moore

The pundit one, is the way I knew Sam Abbott. The teacher, the one with the knowledge.

The many things I learned from Sam Abbott changed my life . . . and so many others. Sam saw something in me that I did not know I had, he found it, and put it to use.

I met Sam in 1977, when the tenants at Winchester Apartments were fighting for better living conditions. We had rats and roaches. We did not have heat and hot water. Sam led the fight, at City Hall. Week after week, year after year, Sam never lost strength or vigor fighting for the rights of others. To know Sam is to know you are going to fight for someone's rights.

Because of Sam Abbott's helping me fight unscrupulous landlords (and winning), this gave me so much attention that I ran for City Council, Takoma Park, MD, and won. Thanks to Sam Abbott, I learned how to fight and win, but most important, I could teach others the things I have learned from Sam Abbott.

Herman Williams, Former City Councilmember
Takoma Park, MD

The first time I saw Sam Abbott, he was marching into a DOT hearing, a short balding white guy leading a crowd of tall black men to protest a highway that would have destroyed their neighborhood and his. He was so wonderfully outrageous as he grabbed the microphone, so pure of heart and strongly articulate. Years later he became my neighbor, my friend, my mayor, my political hero. But the quality that most endeared Sam to me was the way he always made me feel like a part of his family—the way he listened and remembered and teased, treating my children like his own, and welcoming us into his home with so much love.

Betsy Combs

Sam dared more than dream. He dared to lead. By his power to communicate, with the zeal to confront, he transformed his dream for Takoma Park into its identity.

Bruce Moyer

When I heard that Sammie had died, the first memory I had was not one related to his political activism and integrity, for which I had great admiration. Rather, it was a more personal memory.

A day or two after I moved here, Sammie arrived at my door to welcome me and my children to Takoma Park. He told me that he knew who I was, since he knew my ex-husband. He also said that his daughter and granddaughter lived across the street, that his granddaughter was my daughter's age, and that he hoped we would get to know them. (We did and Shoshana and Roxanna became friends and Nancy is one of my dearest friends.) And he welcomed us to his community.

One of the reasons I moved to Takoma Park was because of Sammie Abbott and what he and this community represented. I remember his welcome (as a neighbor, that first week) with warmth and gratitude.

Irene Elkin

. . . Sam liked and appreciated simple things, and he also liked to help people. Once in the Fall, he knocked on our door to say he had six "extra" dogwoods and wouldn't we like them in the yard. Phil and I explained we had too many things to do to get them planted. So Sam said he would plant the trees himself, and he did, digging extra large holes and putting in good stuff. All the trees lived, naturally, and many's the Spring I have stolen a look at "my" old backyard on Maple Avenue, to see the 20 foot tall white lacy hedge that Sam created. . .

Barbara Young

It was a pleasure to know Sam. His activism, his creativity, and his stubborn adherence to principles helped

to create the clan of Takoma Park and its image as an island where the values of earlier generations flourished in spite of the surrounding decay.

At an age when most of us don't expect to be productive, Sam was full of plans and projects for this community. We are still living from the fruits of his ideas. The elementary school across from my house, the relatively spiffy appearance of Old Town, and the folk festival are all the results of his vision and ability to get the rest of us moving.

All of us who worked with him will miss him.

Larry Robinson

Folk Festival

Mayor Sam set an example for public officials all across this country. Affecting change at the local level — that's Sam legacy.

Pete Seeger

"Takoma Park has a wealth of musical talent so let's show it off to the whole world." And that's how the Takoma Park Folk Festival started. In Sam & Ruth's living room, in July of 1978.

Saul Schneiderman

When I think of Sam, I think of a truly inspirational man — uncompromisingly dedicated to justice and the human race, and willing to stand up for his beliefs and do whatever needed to be done to achieve that goal. He was always willing to go much more than the extra mile. He gave so much to so many.

Carol R. Hausner

What I realized after that first Takoma Park Folk Festival meeting was that Sam's advocacy for social change included an understanding of the sensibilities of those who gave voice to the merger of art and activism. A graphic artist by trade and devotion, a brilliant painter in watercolor and oils upon canvas, Sammie could also play a sweet harmonica when he wanted to. Always a lover of folk songs and one who revelled in the camaraderie of group singing, Sam's support of the passionate expression of human talent bears fruit every year at the Takoma Park Folk Festival. I will miss his joy of music and perhaps will remember him most at those wonderful gatherings when we sing our victory songs, celebrating our struggles and furthering the cause of the common good Sam gave his lifelong commitment to.

David Sawyer

There is an old folksong Pete Seeger has been singing for decades called "Passin' Through." The idea is to make up new verses for heroes who made history and whose spirit remains with us. The chorus: "Passin' through, passin' through/ sometimes happy, sometimes blue/ Glad that I ran into you/ Tell the people that you saw me passin' through."

Here's a verse, one of many songs to come, dedicated to Sam Abbott:

"I saw Sammie Abbott lie
Beneath bulldozers so high
He said, 'No freeway's gonna
cut our homes in two.
When all people unite,
stand right up and fight for life,
Peace and freedom will come
shinin' through."

Joni Eisenberg

Work-Related

Dear Sam,

As a son does for his father, a student his mentor and a friend his dearest, I grieve your death.

I love you for your ability to think for yourself, your humor, your clear vision and righteous anger, your fierce determination and mighty energies, how you used your life and what you have done.

Because knowing you was always to be inspired by you, I'm grateful for the time I had here alive with you. I always did my best to be like you and to pass you on to my own and others. I will remember you always.

With great sadness at having to say farewell, yours
forever,

Jim True

I had the privilege of working with Sammie Abbott in the early 1950s, when I became editor-in-chief of "Diplomat Magazine." He was a great help to me. I had confidence in his taste as an artist, and also, his editorial direction as to what subscribers would want to read. I regretted very much when he went on to other employment. He was a very gifted man. He was of great service. He was tough, — but I'm tough too, we got along just fine — but in the long run, he was kindness personified.

Hope Ridings Miller

Former editor-in-chief, "Diplomat Magazine"

Sam Abbott and I worked in the same building on the same floor for over a decade. I chatted with him virtually every week. We talked mostly about politics. In some ways, Sam was a mentor. I learned from him. More importantly, I was always inspired by his life long commitment on behalf of the powerless.

I was always enjoyed our brief visits together. Sam was like a weekly dose of energy. He taught us all the value of long term commitment. He affected my life and I will miss him.

Jeremy Rifkin

I worked with Sam Abbott in the Dupont Circle Building for two years and have known his family for many years. The Sam we saw in the everyday work environment was, to me, much more than Sam the Activist and Organizer that many people knew. Sure, he was always doing graphics work for an urgent cause. He hand-lettered and illustrated hundreds of posters and leaflets in his distinctive style. And he did them early in the morning and late at night and during lunch time because he was also working full time on his "paying" jobs.

This self-sacrifice was inspiring, but there was more to Sam that I will never forget. Like the series of comic posters that he produced for the bulletin board by the elevator, posters that said things like, "There will be a prayer meeting on the roof today. Bring your own yogurt." And I'll never forget walking by his office door and frequently hearing not only a talk show blasting on his radio, but also often hearing Sam shouting into the phone, on the show. Things like, "I'll tell you what's wrong with the Social Security System!"

As passionate as Sam was about all kinds of injustices, he was also passionately funny. In the years that I knew him and his family I always loved hearing hilarious stories about his childhood, his family, people he worked with . . . and I heard them over and over.

I'll always be inspired by Sam the Activist and Organizer, but my best memories are of another Sam, one who readily found humour in himself and others, and who loved to make us laugh.

Chris Lego

I remember one of the most important lessons I learned from Sam . . . We were driving to the Capitol to some anti-war demo. Sam and my Dad were reminiscing about some old friend (?). I don't remember who Someone said "He was a son of a bitch, but a good communist." And Sam said, "You can't be a son of a bitch and be a good communist." Through days, years of dogma and rigid thinking, I've always remembered, and quoted, that line.

Barbara Leckie

Family

As you know, I had an early attachment to your father, dating back in time to the early Thirties. My mother would take me and my brother and sister to Ithaca for the summer in those days to escape the soot and coal dust of Altoona during school vacation. I soon found a role model in your father, Sam, who had recently graduated from the Cornell school of Art and Architecture. He seemed larger than life to me, quite like a magician in his facility for image-making and the paints and brushes with which the trick was done seemed nothing short of the magic wand. I still have, and use, a set of drafting tools he gave me more than fifty years ago.

Abe Ajay

Dec. 24, 1989

Grandpa —

The greatest gift I have to offer is a gift that will last forever. It is the appreciation of life and an honor of the values that have been passed on to me.

You've been my role model, my grandfather, and most of all, my hero. You've helped to not only teach, but show me right from wrong, justice from injustice, outspoken from passive, and respect from disrespect.

What I can do now is use what I've been taught in order to make a difference in this world, just as I have seen you do.

Time passes us by quite simply and silently. Our reaction as humans to time is not so complacent.

Upon the path of life, I'm merely at the starting point, but what I hold is a magic sword that will help me and protect me that has been passed down to me and that I one day will pass down as well.

Love,
Roxanna

Karl Marx, Gruncho Marx, mainstream Bohemian, trained as an architect, famed as an intellect, plaid — tied — conservative fit-to-be-tied, loved English tweed, hated boss greed, anti-war monger with war decorations, unyielding mayor-oral parliamentarian, patriot molded in earlier times, sometimes derisive, often sublime, media rabbi, rabid debator, insomniac, maniac, nuclear reactor, not hardly neutral, punster and funster, saint of just causes, freeway abuser, scenic route chooser, anti-fame, anti-maim, UPI database, middle-age scribe, poster perfectionist, father and grandfather, teacher and preacher, with three sisters, a bridge with no name, quick on the

trigger, quicker to anger, dogmatically anti-dogmatic, anti-litter, round the clock thinker, never a drinker, an atheist monk with a list of demands at the famed kitchen table under Durer's "Praying Hands", a grand contradiction, lover of truth, toxic avenger, tormentor of Ruth, a Mediterranean octogenarian, guitar and harmonica, alarming, disarming, but personally charming, often spoke loudly and carried a little stick, McCarthy, Roy Cohn, Edgar Hoover and Tricky Dick, leader, producer, choreography-minded, both under and overground, surly and surely the last angry man, knew all the Engels, few better read, a pugilist with the history of art in his head, underdog lover of football and cats, libertarian, librarian, wore caps not hats, distrusted big dollars, justice for all, robustly distrustful of Tammany Hall.

A young antiquarian dressed in pressed khaki, gentle and wacky, the means of production in the hands of a few, the gospel according to Mr. Magoo, Taurus the Bull, a God and a damn, a man for seasons and my Uncle Sam.

Bruce Abbott

I remember the first day I saw Sam. It was in the Brookland Church at an ECTC meeting. What struck me about him was that he was a completely genuine type of person.

I remember many incidents following him and his family around for the next 10 years. When he called a particular City Councilman after a meeting a "fascist" for voting a certain way on some issue, he told him nose-to-nose, and the Councilman was quite a bit taller than he was. . . "This is the way it started in Nazi Germany." Maybe he was right.

I remember how he'd play his harmonica in the parlor on Birch Avenue and we'd all sing.

I remember him tip-toeing in to see my newborn son, his grandson. He really couldn't get enough of him.

I could go on, but suffice it to say I always viewed Mr. Abbott as a gentle patriarch, a person to whom I ascribe a noble mind. He was mean when there was a reason for it, and there was plenty of reason for it in his lifetime. Depression, war, disparity between rich and poor, environmental degradation, nuclear war. "To protect and defend" was the job he set out for himself and if he had to do it by himself, he would do it by himself.

I recall an interesting fact about him. He always picked up 2 or 3 newspapers a day and read them from end to end. He never did anything on half calculation, but once his mind was made up, he was completely undivertable. And now, everytime I get on the Metro, I think of Sam Abbott standing on his chair at a Freeway meeting hurling obscenities at the Chairman, and that's the way it should have been, considering the circumstances.

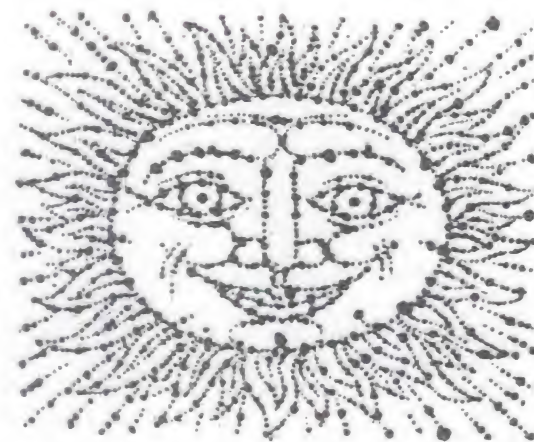
I'm happy that he was an angry man, because he got so much done that way. (I'm afraid no one in opposition to you really understands it when you're nice.) Sam wasn't nice to his enemies—and for that, we have the Metro and

a beautiful City intact.

But to classify Mr. Abbott as a singularly angry man would be to talk about really only 5% of what he was trying to do. His anger was only the tip of the iceberg as far as the man was concerned. There was a classic brilliance in his strategies. A sheer artistry in the execution of those strategies. An indomitable spirit in all that he did. That is why remembering only the anger that he is personified for only represents a very limited view of his life and work. He exercised political artistry. Along with the man whom I knew personally, that is what I remember the most. He was an artist.

Philip M. Vaughan

For Dad
We must find that place
in ourselves that glows—
that recognizes beauty, truth, justice;
that sees, and seeing, acts.
We must nourish that red heat
with love and peace;
and we must touch the truth till it hurts,
protecting the jewel with our humor and rage,
offering fully the fire up to our families,
our friends, our enemies.
For life is time, and time is true.
Through us flows the world.
And everyday we must
hold fast to that red, hot place,
that heat of the world at the center of ourselves.
We must wrap every day of our lives
around the fireball.
For others are watching, hungry, are learning;
and we are more than ourselves.
We are not alone; we are fire and light;
and we are returning all we can be to this earth.
Love, Nancy



R E S O L U T I O N

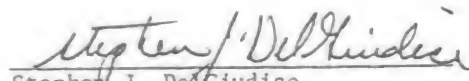
WHEREAS, as of this date, Mayor Sammie A. Abbott will retire from elective office; AND

WHEREAS, it is our desire to take note of, and express appreciation for, his service to the City as Mayor during the period March 1980 to date.


NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Mayor and Council of Takoma Park, Maryland do hereby take recognition of the accomplishments of Sammie A. Abbott, and express gratitude for his valued efforts on behalf of the City and its citizens.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT this resolution be spread among the permanent records of the City of Takoma Park.

NOVEMBER 18, 1985.


Stephen J. DeGiudice
Mayor

ATTEST:


James S. Wilson, Jr.
City Administrator



*This is premature -
Save for a
future funeral
service - on the
next election.
S. Abbott*

It is winter in Takoma Park, the snow now covering the azaleas, dogwoods, and oak. This is the lacy paradise Sam loved and fought for.

The flags at City Hall are at half-mast—and what a sweet victory it is! Sammie hoisted them himself—inch by inch, step by step—through decades of dogged devotion to the ideals for which the flags fly. Ideals that live only as they are tested, challenged, forced to come alive.

My father loved his entire family—parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, wife, children, grandchildren, in-laws, nephews and nieces—with a tremendous, driving passion. And over and over, he told how my mother, Ruth, was absolutely central to his struggles and achievements—all the way down the line. Their 53-year marriage was a true partnership, a loyalty infused with common ideals.

Sam loved his friends. He believed in people, in humanity. No one who knew him was immune from the quick analysis, the sardonic barbs, the mischievous humor and wit—nor the tender concern. And underlying it all was the belief, the absolute conviction, that you were somebody special, that it was you who held destiny in your hands, that your decisions mattered, that you had something to say, to do, to be.

If you miss Sammie as I do, let me share with you a thought with which he, characteristically, comforted me: “No one person is indispensable.”

Sammie Abdullah Abbott was a local hero with a world view and a love of the global landscape. He lived a long life that was a celebration of his earliest ideals. He lived with an urgency matched by his furious hatred of injustice. Underneath his rage was love. Sam sought always to unlayer the deceptions and expose the truth. He was a proud man who stood eye-to-eye with some mighty opponents. The legacy, the challenge, is obvious, is indispensable.

Nancy Abbott Young

“I’m no politician. I want people to get control of their lives and we can start in a small place like Takoma Park. People aren’t apathetic. They’re just without hope. That’s got to change.”



A believer in conservation, Sam Abbott built the extensive terracing at his family's Birch Street home with salvaged materials.



Sam's favorite sculpture, "Repose" by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, photo by Robert C. Lautman.

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